



# AFTER SANDY

Left in ruin, Long Island courses struggle to recover after the most devastating storm in modern memory.

by John Torsiello

**O**n the eve of her arrival, Kevin Stanya watched the weather forecasts about a hurricane developing off the East Coast and he knew it was going to be bad.

In fact, the late-October event we simply refer to today as Superstorm Sandy turned out much worse for Stanya, superintendent at Inwood Country Club in Inwood, N.Y., on Long Island, and other area golf course facilities as they absorbed the brunt of the freakish late-autumn storm.

While Sandy's overall fallout was far worse elsewhere along the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut coastlines, as the storm devastated low-lying areas, ruined neighborhoods and businesses and claimed lives, it left several golf courses in ruins on Long Island. Many are still recovering. In fact, Middle Bay Country Club in Oceanside declared bankruptcy in January and closed. At the time, the storm's damage to the course and its members' personal lives was a cost too much to bear.

"The day after the storm, when I arrived at the club, our entire equipment fleet was under five feet of water and was completely ruined," says Stanya. The damage and cleanup, he estimates, may eventually top \$3 million. "My entire office, including my central control for my irrigation

system and all of my field controllers, were wiped out, totaling over \$135,000. The club's quarters, which houses the staff, was completely underwater and had to be rebuilt. We also had more than 100 trees down and salt water lying in the course's low areas. The club's beach club and main clubhouse also sustained significant damage."

Tim Benedict experienced a similar scenario from Sandy's wrath.

"Every building on the club's grounds was affected and we are still trying to get everything up and running," says the superintendent at The Woodmere Club in Woodmere. The entire bottom floor of the clubhouse that houses the men's and ladies locker room, men's card room, bridal site, 19th-hole bar, nautilus room, weight room, boiler room, electric room and building superintendent's office all took six feet of water. Benedict's maintenance shop, which includes an office, took a whopping six and a half feet of water, along with the pool building, tennis facility, golf course bathroom and a halfway house. "The golf course was almost completely submerged but most of it drained off quickly," he says. "Our irrigation controllers were lost and one of two pump houses were compromised."



A Woodmere Club's foreman powerwashes the silt off of No. 11 and No. 16.

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– Kevin Stanya,  
Inwood Country Club



A boat washed up on the course at Seawane.

Brian Benedict, superintendent at The Seawane Club in Hewlett, estimates Sandy inflicted around \$1 million in damage and clean-up costs.

“We lost a 500-gallon pump station that took six feet of water, 10 Toro VP satellites, and our shop took 18 inches of salt water, damaging or destroying \$600,000 in equipment,” he says.

Sandy storm caused 60 acres of salt water flooding at The Seawane Club with six greens under water for two tidal phases. Treelines around the property were all uprooted, necessitating six months of in-house clean up that was still not complete in early May. Nine docks ran aground and had to be cut up and carted away, four boats got free and ran aground on Seawane’s 13th hole and had to be hauled away, and 175 trees were lost to wind damage and uprooting.

Other clubs hard hit by Superstorm Sandy included Rockaway Hunting Club, located in Cedarhurst, only a few miles from some of the areas hardest hit by the massive and powerful storm that packed hurricane force winds and torrential rain. The pro shop and clubhouse were spared by flood waters and wind, but sections of the course were under water and a boat was reported floating in the middle of the club’s 15th fairway at the height of the storm.

Middle Bay Country Club suffered a reported \$3.5 million in damage and about a third of the club’s approximately 230 members left after the storm because of damage to their homes and businesses. The club estimated it was about \$1.2 million short of what it needed to rebuild its devastated property and the club’s board and members decided that was more than they could financially handle. There have been reports that the club will be purchased and reopened but its future is unclear at this point.

It took superintendents and their staffs several weeks to assess and then start tackling the massive cleanup efforts following the storm.

“It took about two weeks to really get working since we had no equipment and had to wait until we could borrow some stuff,” says Stanya, who added he “was in a funk” after losing everything he owned when a house he was renting in Long



Damage to Seawane's No. 13 fairway. As it dried out a salt layer formed on top.



Left: Woodmere's Timothy J. Benedict, CGCS, standing in his office door with all the storm debris outside. Right: No 2 green at Seawane a few days after Sandy.



Beach, N.Y. was attacked by the storm.

"Prioritized lists were made and we have been knocking items off the list for months. It will be probably a year until we get back to some sense of normalcy," says Brian Benedict. "We took so much salt water the damage was incredible. Between the flooding to the grass, pump station flooding, equipment damage and building structures it's going to be a long, long summer. The organizing of contractors, tree crews, and our greens crew has been an overwhelming task to say the least."

Tim Benedict is "preaching patience" to Woodmere's membership.

"We sustained compromising salt damage to four greens (which were still closed in early May). Damage is two-fold from this event," he says. "Strangely, it's the turf where the drainage is that suffered the most. One would think the salt would immediately flush and the turf would recover. This is not the case. It's almost like those plants had the salt water more available, which shocked them and then the winter desiccation finally had its way with the plants. The same happened with my backyard, the only thing that lived was the compacted turf where the ride-on machine operator enters and exits the yard. I also have two fairways that are slow to recover but I see them starting to push growth."

Stanya, now mostly out of his personal funk, reports "a lot of

dead turf in the low lying areas and very high salt levels at Inwood.

"It has taken a while for the turf to begin shooting new roots but I am beginning to see signs of growth," he says. "I am very positive and believe I can make everyone forget about the storm by Memorial Day weekend."

The response from club management and members has been admirable. "The membership has been great," he says. "A few days after the storm the president of the club, Peter Davidson, came to me and asked what we needed to be open in the spring. We sat down and discussed it and he told me to do whatever it takes to get it done. Repairs were obviously costly and about 15 members laid money out to get the work done until the insurance company reimbursed us. I am very lucky to have a fantastic membership."

Brian Benedict says Seawane's membership has also been understanding of the unique situation.

"The members have been very good with the limited holes available," he says. "We had 11 holes open for play (in the spring) and the members will be playing a composite course for awhile. They have been very supportive and understanding as many of their homes were affected by the superstorm, as well."

Courses near the ocean on Long Island have been through this before, but nothing that compared to the damage unleashed by Sandy.



No 16 fairway at Seawane under salt water.

"We did have damage the previous year from tropical storm Irene, which I believe was worse on the turf because of the time of the year but I did not lose any equipment then," says Stanya.

Seawane floods on a regular basis as the high-tide full-moon phase compromises the course's bulkheads. "The water in our canals and bay is more brackish than the pure Atlantic current water, so when we flood it isn't as severe," Brian Benedict says. "When we took Irene in 2011 it was about a 35-acre flood but we didn't lose power, so we were able to dilute the salt water with our irrigation water right away. When Sandy hit we lost power for eight days and were unable to dilute the salt toxicity, which has created the issues we face now."

Seawane's salt base saturation levels were substantial, to say the least. Normal acceptable levels should be three percent and lower, Brian Benedict says, and "we are testing out at 16 to 24 percent, depending on where you test." He worries about long-term issues. "I am really worried about when the weather changes and we get hot. How is the grass going to react when the soil temps get to 70-plus degrees and up? Is it going to bake out? Our gypsum applications continue and we are seeding greens on a bi-weekly basis trying to get 007 and Seaside II Bentgrass to establish in them."

Recovery has been assisted by influxes of insurance money, Tim Benedict says. "Only recently has the money started flowing, which has definitely delayed our recovery process," he says. "The clubhouse was the first facility to be restored. We must be able to do business and host parties. The rest of the buildings are still coming along. We are still re-wiring buildings and fixing walls. It is a long road. I have a new assistant and that should help things improve a bit.

"On top of everything else, my home was also hit with the flood waters. My family was displaced for five weeks while we got repairs organized," he adds. "Everything is back to normal now but that was a true life test."

One that Long Island golf course superintendents, managers and owners, and members hope they never have to face again. **GCI**

*John Torsiello is a Torrington, Conn.-based writer and frequent GCI contributor.*

by Richard Skelly

## DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

After a throttling by Superstorm Sandy, Garden State golf courses recoup and regroup.

**S**uper Storm Sandy, which struck New Jersey Oct 28-29, delivered an unprecedented \$39 billion in damage to shore-area residences, businesses, beaches and boardwalks, but its effects were also widely felt a good ways inland from Monmouth, Ocean and Atlantic counties, and as far north as parts of Long Island and Connecticut.

Hundreds of golf courses throughout The Garden State suffered severe damage in this late-season hurricane. Most club managers and superintendents prepared for a rain event and instead got some of the most extreme winds the New York metro area has seen in 50 years, winds that carried over with just as much intensity to the rest of the storm-hit areas.

April 29 marked six months out from Super Storm Sandy, a two-day and night event that effectively shut down New York City's transit system, the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway, two major highways.

As well prepared as most superintendents around the state were, Lance Rogers, superintendent of greens at Colonia Country Club in Woodbridge, N.J., and president of the New Jersey Golf Course Superintendents' Association, says, "The storm was substantial, and up until yesterday, I was still cleaning up debris in the woods at Colonia."

"I thought we suffered pretty bad damage, but in reality, we lost far fewer trees than most other courses in New Jersey," Rogers remembers.

Colonia Country Club lost 28 big trees larger than 36 inches in circumference, and since they were fallen trees, not leaning into others, Rogers and his crew handled all of the work themselves.

"The storm ended late Monday night, but we couldn't get in to work on Tuesday, so we started Wednesday morning. Even with



10-hour days, it took a solid week to get the trees that had fallen into play cut up and then it took another two weeks to clean up the debris and then three weeks to chip all the stuff.”

Rogers says the average number he heard from other supers in most of the state “was more like 160 trees down for each golf course.”

The eye of Superstorm Sandy came in over Brigantine, home for many years to the Links at Brigantine, a place where PGA pros used to go in the 1930's and 40's to practice for the British Open. Known for its near-constant breezes, Brigantine is also home to a massive migratory bird sanctuary and preserve.

Nathan Robbins, general manager at the Links at Brigantine, said the 18-hole golf course suffered more from water damage than from wind.

“The eye of the storm literally crossed 17th Street in Brigantine, so in some ways it was a blessing,” Robbins says.

“If you look at damage to places twenty miles north of us, they really had sustained winds. Our damage was limited to flooding,



A view of the sky from the 11th tee at TCP Jasna Polana following Superstorm Sandy.

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Right: Damage to the 7th green at TPC Jasna Polana following the destruction of Superstorm Sandy. Far right: Debris cleanup at TPC Jasna Polana.

and we were fortunate not to have any water in our clubhouse or cart barn. But there were areas of the course under three and four feet of water, and that forced us to close for three weeks after the storm.”

Links at Brigantine was back up and running by Thanksgiving.

The Links at Brigantine’s 9th and 18th greens were the only ones underwater for any length of time, “but we had an 18-foot powerboat that was in the left rough of our second hole for a time, and the walking bridge on the third hole ended up in the left rough of the second hole.” Robbins says the walking bridge must weigh at least a ton, and the force of the incoming water moved it more than 100 yards.

“We didn’t have any fast moving current so it was more a matter of making sure we did everything we could to make sure the effects of salt water were limited,” Robbins says. Absecon Bay is about 50 yards from the 1st tee at the Links, and the 15th hole sports a peninsula green, which also got submerged, but for much less time than the 9th and 18th greens.

The Links at Brigantine re-opened to those who enjoy winter golf Thanksgiving week.

“One of the biggest challenges has been combating the perception that this whole area was closed down and damaged beyond repair. There was no damage to Atlantic City casinos and no damage to the boardwalk there. Other area golf courses might have had a tree or two come down, but for the most part, they were back open within a week,” Robbins says.

Matthew Morrow, the superintendent at Manasquan River Golf Club in Brielle, a private club nestled along the river of the same name and less than two miles from the ocean, says he, the GM and members at the course used Super Storm Sandy as a learning experience and found out ways to improve on infrastructure and drainage on the property.

“Hopefully this is a once-in-a-lifetime event. The good part about the whole experience was we learned a lot about the golf course and how we can improve drainage and create a better tree management program,” Morrow says, adding Manasquan River lost about 100 trees.

“We had a 25-foot and a 38-foot boat that both ended up on the golf course,” Morrow says. Needless to say, both boat owners im-

mediately came forward on Tuesday, Oct. 30th to make arrangements with their insurance companies to have their vessels removed from the 12th and 17th holes.

Morrow said he and his crew did as much as they could in-house but left big or overly dangerous jobs to a tree company in Pennsylvania that he’d worked with in the past.

“Losing power was pretty a much a foregone conclusion in my mind and knowing the golf course is so close to river and we were going to flood, we got all our pumps ready and our equipment fueled up and generators were all primed and ready to go,” he says. Manasquan River leads to the Manasquan Inlet which leads out to the ocean, visible on clear days from the course’s 7th, 10th and 11th holes.

One thing Morrow and other seaside superintendents may not have considered was the effects of salt-laden blown air and the damage that can do to trees and grasses.

“Salt blown air actually damaged trees several miles inland, including some of ours,” he said, “we were prepared for flooding and wind damage, but then to have a secondary issue with trees that were saturated with salt air and subsequently falling down, the needles

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“Even with ten hour days, it took a solid week to get the trees that had fallen into play cut up and then it took another two weeks to clean up the debris and then three weeks to chip all the stuff.”

– Lance Rogers, *Colonia Country Club in Woodbridge, N.J.*

falling off of them and turning brown and off color, was a whole other problem.”

Manasquan River lost power on Monday, Oct. 29 and it wasn't restored until Friday, Nov. 9th. “We had the ability to pump gas even though we didn't have electricity and so we were able to remove an immense amount of debris that needed clean up and we worked on that until we got power back on,” Morrow says.

At the TPC Jasna Polana Golf Club in the estate section of Princeton Township, more than 100 trees fell on the property. Fortunately, very few of them fell on fairways or roughs directly on the 18-hole tract designed by Gary Player. Tim Connolly started at TPC Jasna Polana in the spring of 2012. In general at the Tournament Players Club network of courses, maintenance is a top priority, and budgets for maintenance are very different than many other private courses.

“We were relatively lucky,” Connolly says, “it was more a wind event and less a flooding event. We only had three inches of rain but we did have 144 trees down on the property.”

“Of those, however, only a small percentage were in a place that would affect play.”

“The club has a good insurance policy, and most of the work was performed by outside tree experts, especially more of the high-risk work, because I didn't want my staff involved in that,” he says.

Over the winter, he estimated he and his crew spent about 800 hours doing storm repair damage, and of that was large branches and fallen trees in high visibility areas off the fairways and roughs.

“I think we were lucky in another way; we do have woodlands on the property but the aesthetic of the property hasn't really changed that much, we didn't lose a single tee or a single putting green,” he said, noting that power was out for four days in Princeton Township. “The week the storm was approaching, we needle-tined the greens, as a corrective measure, so that if we did have a large rain event, we'd be prepared.”

The club itself was closed until Saturday, Connolly says, “but we moved greens on Saturday morning, and considering all the debris that was around, that was a huge accomplishment.”

A meeting of the superintendents association was slated for just two weeks after

Superstorm Sandy hit. The meeting took place at Hominy Hill Golf Course in Monmouth County in mid-November. “We had our annual meeting and the National Golf Course Superintendents' Association offered assistance to New Jersey supers who may have needed it,” Rogers says. “Aside from that, the New Jersey chapter of the association offered assistance to superintendents personally, if there was dire need, people made themselves available to help other superintendents.”

The mid-November annual meeting was lightly attended, no doubt a reflection of how overwhelmed many superintendents were in dealing with post-Sandy cleanup. “It was a small turnout that day in mid-November, because people had other concerns. We had an assistants meeting ten days later at Jasna Polana, and I don't know what the turnout was, but it was also very low,” Rogers says.

“Most courses have insurance against bad weather events, but my understanding is a lot of the insurance companies have been slow in responding,” he says. **GCI**

*Richard Skelly is a Spotswood, N.J.-based writer and frequent GCI contributor.*